

Reflection for Good Friday

Since moving to Suffolk nearly three years ago, Chris & I have attended the one hour devotion in the benefice on Good Friday. This has been a very moving experience, with prose, poetry and music to reflect on. This year is very different experience for all of us. We each have had to find our own way of reflecting the passion and sacrifice of Christ.

As I have mentioned before, having been to Jerusalem puts a very different light on things and so this Good Friday I have reflected on my experience following the footsteps of Christ during Holy week.

Whilst there is no archaeological evidence for many of the 'holy sites' in Jerusalem, there is no doubt that the house of Caiaphas is genuine.



'And they led Him to the house of Caiaphas'.

Our visit here, very early in the morning, took us down to the dungeon where there is a hole in the floor to a pit below. This is the only such pit to have been found. Prisoners were lowered into this 'hole' on a rope harness. The only entrance was through the roof. It is thought that Jesus would have been lowered into this pit to be kept safe over night before his appearance before Caiaphas. He was a political prisoner, and therefore needed protecting, not just to stop any plots to free him, but also to stop those who might have tried to kill him. There is now an entrance carved through the stone so that visitors can go in. Standing there, looking up at the hole was an extremely moving experience. To imagine what Jesus must have been feeling spending the night alone there in the dark, still tied to the rope harness was very hard.



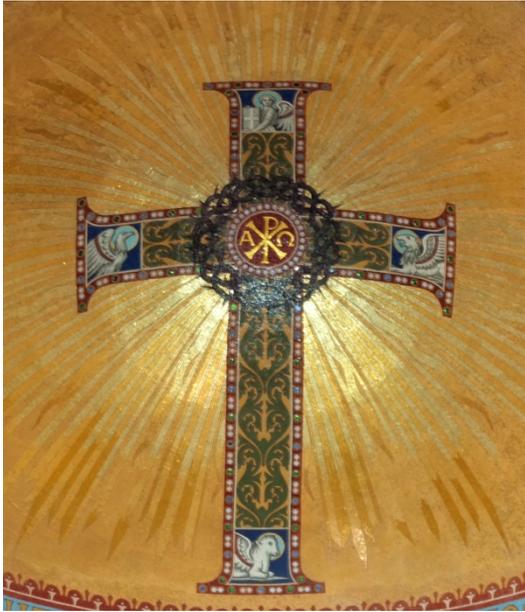
'The pit at the House of Caiaphas'.

While Jesus was in the pit, waiting for morning, Peter was outside, waiting by the fire. It was here that he denied Christ three times.

Outside in the dungeons there are tethering loops carved into the rock. These would have been used to tether prisoners while they were flogged. There are also two basins carved into the bedrock which may have contained salt to put on the wounds after flogging. Flogging was brutal. A maximum of 40 lashes were allowed as anymore could result in the prisoner dying, which would not have been the sentence. Usually only 39 applied in case of miscounting. But even so, being tethered by chains to the rock, and receiving 39 lashes is beyond what we could imagine. Matthew tells us that Pilate had Jesus flogged before being handed over to be crucified. This was unlikely to have taken place in the house of Caiaphas, but the process would have been the same.

And after all this, Jesus was given his cross to carry and led out to be crucified. He was paraded through Jerusalem, through the narrow streets along the path similar to the one that we now know as the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrows. After all he had been through it was no wonder that he could not carry his cross. But the soldiers were not being kind to him in asking Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross. As mentioned before, Jesus was a political prisoner, and as such, he needed to die on the cross, not on the way to being crucified.

And so He was crucified. For us, for me, and for the world. And as I reflect on this horrendous journey, I wonder where I would have been. In the crowds shouting for Him to be crucified; trying not to be noticed, like Peter; or standing watching and mourning with the women from Galilee. I like to think it would be the last one, but how many times have I denied Him, or tried not to be noticed in my life. Every time I say I must try harder but I can only do this with Jesus help and courage.



'The cross in the chapel of the convent of Ecce Homo'

The following prayer that I have found really helpful during my reflections this Holy week.

'Blessed are you, Lord God of our salvation,
To you be praise and glory forever.
As a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief
Your only Son was lifted up
That he might draw the whole world to himself.
May we walk this day in the way of the cross
And always be ready to share its weight,
Declaring your love for the world.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Amen.